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Statistics and information culture: the population census case

The information as indispensable source for population censuses,
and the population census as source for indispensable informations
(Abstract of PhD thesis)

The starting point of the thesis is that statistics constitute a universal language, thus one of the conditions of an objective analysis is the availability of internationally comparable data bases and communication technologies. This principle will be proven by presenting the preliminaries and the evolution of the population census as statistical activity, and in the context of the information as source and result.

Ensuing to some short presentation of historical statistics, the thesis deals with the main features of Hungarian censuses, their major objectives. Then, the system of international statistical institutions and its role in the harmonisation of population censuses is dealt with. In fact all these go back first to the second half of the 19th century, and have been consolidated later on by the activities of the League of Nations, the UN after World War II, and Eurostat in the last third of the 20th century. Separate chapters are dealing with the census recommendations, as well as the utility of censuses.

There are several methods and procedures that are intended or – in some countries – even used as to complement or substitute for traditional population and housing censuses. These comprise the exclusive use of administrative sources (registres), the use of small sample surveys, the so-called rolling census and any composite method of these. The undeniable advantages are discussed as well as their drawbacks to be solved or accepted with unavoidable compromises. The international approaches as well as the conditions to be fulfilled in order to adapt these methods in Hungary are dealt with.

Separate chapter has been dedicated to present the relationship between statistics and libraries, stressing the importance of the Library and Archives of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The emerging role of the virtual statistical library on the web, being realized with the connection of national and international statistical databases.

Special attention has been paid to data protection in the context of both censuses and other statistical surveys, including the conflict between the necessity of data on the one hand, and data privacy, on the other, as well as relevant national and international legislation. Taking into account the possibilities related to the statistical use of modern administrative sources, the aforementioned conflicts should be solved as efficiently and soon as possible. As memorable examples of the misuses of census data and their impact on the statistical activity, the deportation of a part of Hungary's German minority after World War II, and that of Japanese Americans in this same war, have been briefly discussed.

National and international standard classifications constitute the framework of the collection, processing and dissemination of the statistical data. The most relevant industrial, occupational, educational and territorial classifications and nomenclatures used in censuses, i.e. ISCO, ISIC, ISCED, NUTS and their Hungarian counterparts have been presented to some extent.

The next chapter deals with census processing and dissemination means and methods. Special attention has been paid to the results, international penetration and national use of new technologies (optical reading, the uses of geographic information systems, public microdata).

The last chapter states on the persisting character of official statistics as part of public wealth. At the same time, a growing number of market-oriented companies are striving after establishing their own data collections and the dissemination of statistical information. That is, in order to correctly present economic and social processes, the role of official statistics should be redefined and the statistical information system transformed as to comply with the needs of political, market and research actors.